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SUBJECT: SCORE ONE FOR REFORM: LABOR MINISTER SACKED FOR
BRIBERY

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INTERNET OR INTRANET.

1. (SBU) The Obasanjo Administration scored its first major anti-corruption coup when the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offenses Commission (ICPC) on December 3 announced its arrest and detention of seven persons, including current Minister of Labor Hussaini Zannuwa Akwanga, in connection with a scandal in the national identity card project. President Obasanjo terminated the Minister's appointment the next day. Several of the officials arrested had served in the Ministry of Internal Affairs between 1999 and 2003, including former Interior Ministers Sunday Afolabi and Mahmud Shata, and current Interior Ministry Permanent Secretary Akerele. Labor Minister Akwanga had previously

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served as the Permanent Secretary at Interior Affairs.

2. (U) The French firm SAGEM was awarded the contract to produce the ID cards in 2001 for 214 million USD, while Afolabi was Minister. SAGEM has already received nearly 150 million USD for the project which has registered more than 50 million Nigerians. A business partner with SAGEM, Mr. Niyi Adelagun has also been arrested; the ICPC reports that Adelagun was the chief conduit of money to the various Nigerian officials. Christopher Orumgre Agidi, former Director of the Department of National Civic Registration has been arrested in the U.K., and the GON is currently seeking his extradition. The other official charged in the scandal is Dr. Okwesilieze Nwodo, a former Governor of Enugu State and Secretary of the ruling People's Democratic Party.

3. (SBU) COMMENT: This is the best news reformers in Nigeria have had in a long time. President Obasanjo started the ICPC in 1999 to investigate government corruption, but the ICPC has done little until now and many Nigerians had considered it toothless. Further concrete reform action may be in the offing. The separate (GON-internal) Code of Conduct Tribunal has announced it is bringing charges against several other, as yet unnamed, public officials, including Governors and a Ministry's Permanent Secretary, for failing to declare their assets.

MEECE